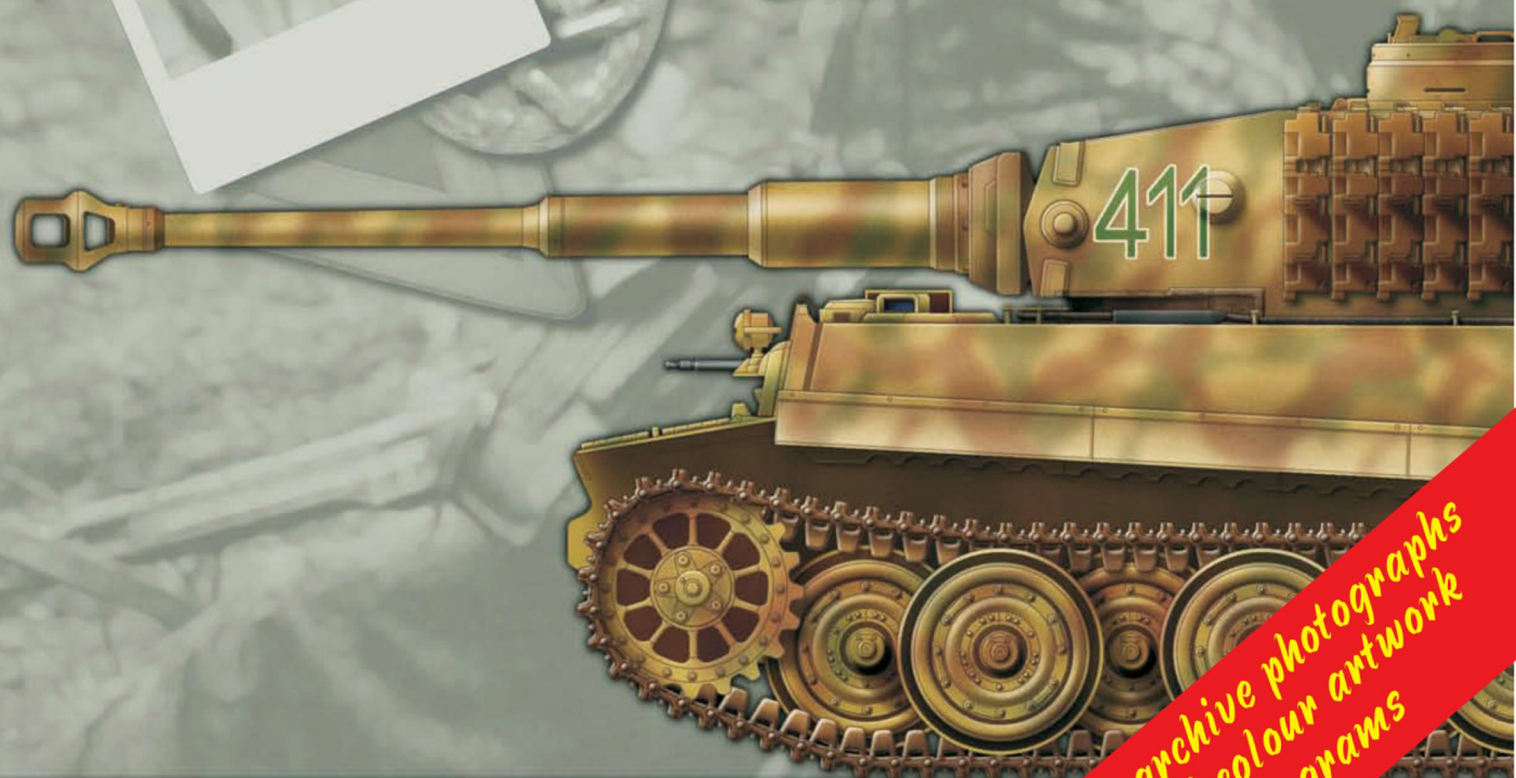


UNDER THE GUN 3

# WESTWALL

GERMAN ARMOUR IN THE WEST, 1945

DENNIS OLIVER



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**UNDER THE GUN 3**  
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**ILLUSTRATIONS BY CLAUDIO FERNÁNDEZ**  
**ISBN 978-0-9806593-6-8**

**Acknowledgments**

The author and publisher would like to thank the staff of the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland, the National Library of Australia, Canberra for their kind assistance and advice, the National Archives of Canada and the town council of Blâmont, France. We would also like to thank all those who contribute to the Axis History Forum - particularly the late Ron Klages whose research has proved invaluable once again - Tigers in Focus website, Feldgrau Forum, Panzer-Archiv.de, Die Deutsche Wehrmacht website and Missing Lynx. In addition to the websites mentioned, the following printed works were also consulted.

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Printed in Australia by  
Printmedia  
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**Front cover: Pzkw VI Tiger I. 4 Kompanie, schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506. Belgium, January 1945.** Raised from Panzer-Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Abteilung 500 in July 1944 as Panzer Kompanie Hummel, this unit was incorporated into schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506 as its fourth company in December 1944 in time to take part in the Ardennes Offensive. The vehicle shown here was destroyed by its crew with two Tiger II tanks of the battalion near Oberwampach, northeast of Bastogne on 17 January 1945.



Left: An Sdkfz 251/22 ausf D half-track of 11.Panzer-Division. This vehicle is also shown and discussed in the colour illustrations on the outside back cover. (NARA). Right: A Panzerjäger V Jagdpanther knocked out in northern Germany by Canadian troops in March, 1945 possibly from schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 519 which was attached to 1.Arme in March or I Abteilung, Panzer Regiment 130 of the Panzer-Lehr-Division which had 15 of these vehicles and was operating against the Canadians at that time. (National Archives of Canada)



On Saturday 21 October 1944, Aachen - the burial place of Charlemagne, the city where the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire were crowned - became the first German town to fall to the western Allies. Between the end of July and the beginning of September 1944, the US, British and Canadian armies had broken through the German lines in Normandy and advanced at a heady pace, reaching the Seine a full eleven days before their most optimistic expectations. The German commanders had pinned their hopes on containing and then destroying the Allied enclave in Normandy, forbidden as they were to conduct any kind of withdrawal. When the German defences finally broke, they had neither the reserves to fill the gap nor prepared positions to fall back to west of the Rhine. Worse, an orderly retreat was no longer a possibility and almost 50,000 German soldiers were taken prisoner during this period - while some 10,000 of their comrades lay dead in Normandy. The largest natural barrier between the invasion beaches and the borders of the Reich - the River Seine - proved to be just as problematic to the retreating units of the Wehrmacht and most of the tanks and other vehicles that survived the Normandy battles were abandoned on its western side. Pressuring the Germans even further, a combined Franco-American force had landed in the south of France on 15 August and by mid-September had managed to linked up with the US 3rd Army creating a wall of Allied armies that ranged from Antwerp to the Swiss border. British and American commanders openly talked of a peace in time for Christmas.

And then the Allied advance stopped. Although their headlong rush through France and the Low Countries had been spectacularly successful they had failed to capture a port of any significance meaning that all supplies had to be transported by road from Normandy. In addition, the troops were simply exhausted.

In September an ambitious operation to restart the Allied offensive and capture a crossing of the Rhine - Operation Market Garden - was blunted by a German force based around II SS-Panzerkorps which was at least partially rested and re-equipped. One important consequence of the failure of Market Garden had been a renewal of confidence among the soldiers of the Wehrmacht, reigniting their faith that Germany was far from defeated. And indeed, the headlong retreat was over and the Germans were now falling back on strong, prepared positions. In October Heeresgruppe B, by now reduced to a number of ad hoc battle groups, held out against two US armies in the Hürtgen Forest and although Aachen fell, it was at enormous cost to the Americans. The Allied attempts to seize the Roer dams before the onset of winter were no more successful and the Germans considered this series of battles to have been a serious defeat for the Allies. Any setback however, could at best be only temporary.

On the morning of 16 December the Germans launched a powerful armoured offensive in the Ardennes - codenamed *Wacht am Rhein* - catching the Allies completely by surprise, the main weight of the offensive falling on a single US Army corps. In scenes reminiscent of the *Blitzkrieg*, two panzer armies were able to push aside the initially weak defence and drive westward towards Antwerp in an attempt to split the British and Americans. However, within days massive Allied reinforcements were able to halt the Germans short of their main objective, the River Meuse.

Although no longer capable of advancing, the Germans managed to hold many of their gains well into 1945. A table giving the numbers for fully-tracked armoured fighting vehicles on hand in December can be seen on page 3. On New Year's Eve, while *Wacht am Rhein* was underway, the Germans managed to mount another offensive south of the Ardennes codenamed *Nordwind*. This attack also enjoyed some initial successes but petered out by 25 January.

Although the Ardennes Offensive had not achieved any of its major objectives, the sudden appearance of so many well equipped and highly motivated enemy troops had proven to the Allies that the Germans were still capable of surprising them, and indeed highlighted a failure of Allied intelligence that began as early as Normandy when the difficulty of operating in the Bocage country had not been foreseen.

In January 1945, the western Allies stood on the borders of the Reich and the last major natural barrier - the Rhine - lay before them. If their failure to capture a crossing during Market Garden had boosted the confidence of the Germans, the offensives of December had shown that although victory was assured, it would be a very bloody affair indeed and that the war may drag on well into the new year.

By mid February the British and Canadians had captured Cleve, Goch and Calcar and by the first week of March the Americans had taken Cologne. In what proved to be a great surprise to both sides, the Ludendorf Bridge over the Rhine at Remagen was captured intact on 7 March.

Incredibly, many of the major German armoured formations were still intact and new units were either being planned or actually raised from training and replacement battalions. Many of these however never materialised and those that did were little more than ad hoc battle groups. Typical of these late war units was Panzer-Division Clausewitz and a detailed order of battle is given on page 33.

In late March the British crossed the Rhine at Wesel preceded by the last large paratroop drop of the war in Europe. The ground troops had no difficulty in linking up with the paratroops and by nightfall of the first day all the crossing points were secured. At almost the same time the Americans crossed the river near Oppenheim. By the end of the month the important towns of Darmstadt and Wiesbaden were in allied hands and US Army units were closing on Frankfurt-am-main encircling approximately 325,000 German troops, the remains of Heeresgruppe B and parts of Heeresgruppe A, in what was to become known as the Ruhr pocket. Fighting doggedly the last German units held out until 21 April.

Late on Wednesday 11 April, US troops reached the River Elbe just 50 miles from Berlin. This was the agreed limit of the western Allied advance and while the British in the north pressed forward, US and French forces turned south towards what was fully expected to be the German's final stand - the *Alpenfestung*. Indeed, the spectre of a German last ditch defence, commanded personally by Hitler and conducted by fanatical, elite units in the mountainous regions of Germany and Austria was given so much credence by the Allies that the US drive into Czechoslovakia was undertaken, in large part, to prevent German troops withdrawing into the Alpine Redoubt.

The death of Adolf Hitler on 30 April provided the catalyst for surrender - at least in the West - and on 4 May, the German command began negotiations with the British. Just three days later on Monday 7 May, General Jodl signed the instrument of unconditional surrender directing all German units to cease operations at midnight on the following day. The war was over.

The images reproduced in this book were all taken in the last few desperate months of the war. Captured on film by official Allied photographers, they allow us to see exactly how these vehicles appeared in combat - many being made just hours or days after they were captured or disabled. Inevitably, some photographs depict the unfortunate casualties of war and readers are reminded that the decision to include them was not taken lightly - the alternative being to ignore the realities of our subject matter.



Photographed in La Bourgnance on 15 November 1944 this Sdkfz 251/21 Drilling was destroyed by artillery units of the US 3rd Infantry Division. The gunner's protective shield, the sight and the breech of the right hand gun can be seen behind the additional armour on the hull side. Another gun would be directly below the site and it would appear that the left hand gun is missing. These vehicles utilised the large quantity of 1.5cm MG 151/15 or the 2cm 151/20 guns which were no longer required by the Luftwaffe. The three guns were fixed to a pedestal bolted to the floor of the crew compartment which also carried an ammunition container for each gun. This half-track shows several features indicative of late production models including the Bosch headlight and the late style road wheels with a metal ring over the hub. (NARA)





An RSO/01 (Raupenschlepper Ost) tractor captured from 19.Volksgrenadier-Division and photographed at Sierck-les-Bains in late November 1944. The division's unit insignia can be seen on the cab front just to the right of the Nutek headlight. Above that and slightly to the right is the tactical sign denoting a towed artillery unit. The cloth covering on the cab roof is a US Army aerial recognition device. Versatile and reliable, almost 23,000 of these vehicles were produced between late 1942 and the war's end by Steyr, Wanderer-Auto-Union, Graf und Stift and Klockner-Deutz-Magirus which alone manufactured 12,500 vehicles. The RSO/01 model seen here is easily identified by its rounded cab while the RSO/02 and RSO/03 both featured a more angular version. A Raupenschlepper Gebirge was also produced especially for use in mountainous regions. (NARA)



At left: The Panzer Assault Badge, this version awarded to tank crews who had taken part in 100 armoured actions. Larger than the original Panzerkampfabzeichen - an example of which can be seen on page 30 - these badges were finished to a high standard with the wreath in gilt and the centre silvered. Behind the badge is a postcard suggesting that boys of the Hitler Youth should volunteer for the armed forces. (Author's collection). Below: An RSO/03 captured intact with its 10.5cm leFH18M howitzer. Apart from the obvious modification of a simpler, straight sided cab, these vehicles were powered by a Deutz diesel engine which replaced the Steyr V8 engine used for the RSO/01. (NARA)





## PANZERS IN THE WEST - DECEMBER 1944

The table below was compiled from several sources including unit histories and gives the strength of tank, anti-tank and assault gun units prior to the Ardennes Offensive. Note that only fully tracked vehicles are shown.

	Panzer III	PzBeoWag III	Bergepanzer III	Panzer IV	PzBeoWag IV	Bergepanzer IV	Pz IV/70 A	Pz IV/70 V	Jagdpanzer IV	Möbelwagen	Wirbelwind	Flakpanzer 38	Panther	Bergepanther	Jagdpanther	Sturmiger	Tiger I	Tiger II	Heizer	Nashorn	Marder III	StuG III	StuG IV	StuH 42	
<b>2.Panzer-Division</b>				28				3*		37	4	3	64									24			(1)
<b>9.Panzer-Division</b>				28						4	4		57												(2)
Panzer-Artillerie Regt 102		2			2																				
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 50								14	9													14			
<b>11.Panzer-Division</b>				31						7	8		47	4											(3)
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 61									14																
<b>21.Panzer-Division</b>				34						3	5		38												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 200			1						1																
<b>116.Panzer-Division</b>				21						3			41												(4)
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 228			1					11																	
<b>Panzer-Lehr-Division</b>				27						4	3		30	2											(5)
<b>3.Panzergrenadier-Division</b>	1*		2*																			41			(6)
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 3								17													7				
<b>15.Panzergrenadier-Division</b>	1*			14						2															(7)
Panzer-Abteilung 115																						30			
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 33																						2			
<b>25.Panzergrenadier-Division</b>			1					6	5	37			11												(8)
<b>Panzer-Brigade 103</b>																									
II/Panzer Regiment 2				6			11																		
<b>Panzer-Brigade 106</b>																									
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 2106				2				4		4			10									5			
<b>Panzer-Brigade 150</b>																									
Kampfgruppe X													5												
Kampfgruppe Y																						5			
<b>Führer-Begleit-Brigade</b>																									
Panzer Regiment FBB			2	17			5			4	4														
II/Panzer Regiment GD				7			38																		
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 673																						5		5	
Panzer-Artillerie Regt 120		5																							
<b>Führer-Grenadier-Brigade</b>																									
II/Führer-Grenadier-Brigade				8																		11			
III/Führer-Grenadier-Brigade								12		4			37	2									1*		(9)
<b>1.SS-Panzer-Division</b>																									
SS-Panzer Regiment 1				37							4		4	42											
Schwere-SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501																		45							
<b>2.SS-Panzer-Division</b>				28						4	4		58									28			
<b>9.SS-Panzer-Division</b>				32						8			33									28			(10)
<b>10.SS-Panzer-Division</b>				2				10	3	8			10	1											(11)
<b>12.SS-Panzer-Division</b>				37									41												
<b>17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division</b>			1									6										17			(12)
Panzer-Abteilung (Fkl) 301														2			27								
Panzer-Kompanie (Fkl) 319																						5			
<b>Schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506</b>																									(13)
<b>Panzer-Komp (Flamm) 352</b>																									
<b>Panzer-Komp (Flamm) 353</b>																									
<b>Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 93</b>																									
<b>Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 519</b>								9						4											
<b>Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 525</b>																						10			
<b>Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 559</b>				3				18		4	3														
<b>Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 560</b>				3				31			4			1	4										
<b>Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654</b>														1	20										
<b>Schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 655</b>								31						1	9										
<b>Heeres Panzerjäger-Abteilung 741</b>																									
<b>Sturm-Mörser Komp. 1000</b>																	4								(14)
<b>Sturm-Mörser Komp. 1001</b>																	4								(15)
<b>Stug-Abteilung 200</b>			2																			22	9		(16)
<b>Stug-Abteilung 243</b>																						23	12		
<b>Stug-Abteilung 244</b>																						14			
<b>Stug-Abteilung 280</b>																						17			(17)
<b>Stug-Abteilung 341</b>																						10	10		(18)
<b>Stug-Abteilung 905</b>																								9	(19)
<b>Stug-Abteilung 911</b>			2																			34			(20)

(1)\*Received during December. (2)3 Panther and 14 StuG were in transit on 14.12.44. (3)30 Panzer IV and 37 Panthers were in transit on 14.12.44. (4)5 Panzer IV, 23 Panther and 14 StuG were in transit on 16.12.44. (5)10 Panzer IV and 10 Panther were in transit on 8.12.44. (6)\*Both these vehicles were Befehlspanzer. (7)\*Befehlspanzer. (8)30 Panthers were in transit on 14.12.44. (9)\*Received during December. (10)25 Panthers were in transit on 8.12.44. (11)34 Panzer IV and 25 Panthers were in transit on 8.12.44. (12)23 StuG III and 19 StuG IV on hand at the end of December. (13)6 Tigers were in transit on 10.12.44. (14)Some sources give 3 vehicles only. (15)Some sources give 3 vehicles only. (16)The correct title was Sturmgeschütz-Ersatz und Ausbildung-Abteilung 200. (17)12 StuH 42 had been on hand the previous month and it is likely that some at least were available in December. (18)5 StuG III and 7 StuH 42 in repair 16.12.44. (19)Renamed Heeres Sturmartillerie-Brigade 905 in late 1944. (20)Attached to the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade.



On the morning of 14 November 1944, elements of the US 314th Infantry Regiment of the 79th Division, advancing from Montigny south of Nancy, reached the village of Halloville, some 20 kilometres east of Luneville. Facing the Americans were the 553.Volks-Grenadier-Division to the north of the town and the 708.Volks-Grenadier-Division to the south - Halloville in fact marked the junction of the two German divisions. Realising the danger that this presented the commander of 708.Volks-Grenadier-Division ordered his men to prepare an immediate counterattack. As the German units were assembling just east of Halloville, they were struck by a combined American force made up of the 79th Division's 315th Infantry Regiment supported by tanks and tank destroyers. Caught completely by surprise the Grenadiers and their supporting assault guns of Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 1708 were forced into a disorderly retreat, losing most of their armoured vehicles in the process. The official caption of this US Signal Corps photograph, taken on 17 November, is rather vague regarding the location, stating merely that it is near Halloville. However, I am almost certain that the church in the background is the l'église de Halloville which sits at the intersection of the Rue Saint-Georges and the Rue des Trois Fontaine and faces northwest towards Luneville. Although the spire of the present day church is significantly different from that seen in our photograph, a drawing of the church made in 1927 by Edmond Delorme, a noted architectural artist, is identical to that seen here. The damage to the building's roof is obvious and it may have undergone extensive restoration after the war. In all other respects the present day structure is identical and there is indeed today an open field to the east of the church. There is also an established wooded area to the south which would have helped to conceal the American advance which came from that direction. Depicted here is one of the Jagdpanzer 38(t) Hetzer tank destroyers of 708. Volks-Grenadier-Division, which had 14 available in November 1944. This division was formed from the remnants of 708.Infanterie-Division as part of the German Army's 32nd recruitment, referred to as Welle - literally wave - conducted between September and October 1944. All such divisions contained a Panzerjäger-Abteilung made up of a company of towed anti-tank guns, another of towed anti-aircraft guns and a Sturmgeschütz company - invariably referred to in these battalions as an Abteilung - equipped with self-propelled tank destroyers. (NARA)











*A Pzkw V Panther ausf G of I Abteilung, Panzer Regiment 16 of 116. Panzer-Division and a Pzkw IV ausf J from 6. Kompanie of the division's II Abteilung photographed in the town of Hotton, Belgium on Sunday, 26 December 1944. The regiment was part of a battle group which attempted to capture the town on the previous Thursday. The Panther is a late model vehicle evidenced by the raised fan cover on the rear deck just behind the radio antenna and the extended mantlet of the main gun. (NARA)*



*US soldiers examine a 3.7cm Flak 43 Möbelwagen near the town of Hosingen in northern Luxembourg in early 1945. Both 2. Panzer-Division and Panzer-Lehr-Division were involved in the fighting in this area and both had four of these vehicles on hand on when the Ardennes Offensive began on 16 December 1944. (NARA)*



Both photographs on this page were taken in northern Luxembourg near the German border between Clervaux Clerf and Hosingen sometime after the Ardennes Offensive. This photograph shows a late production Pzkw V Panther ausf G of I Abteilung, Panzer Regiment 33 of 9. Panzer-Division. Photographs of other tanks of this regiment's third company taken at the same time confirm that it was common practice to repeat the tank's number on the turret rear. (NARA)



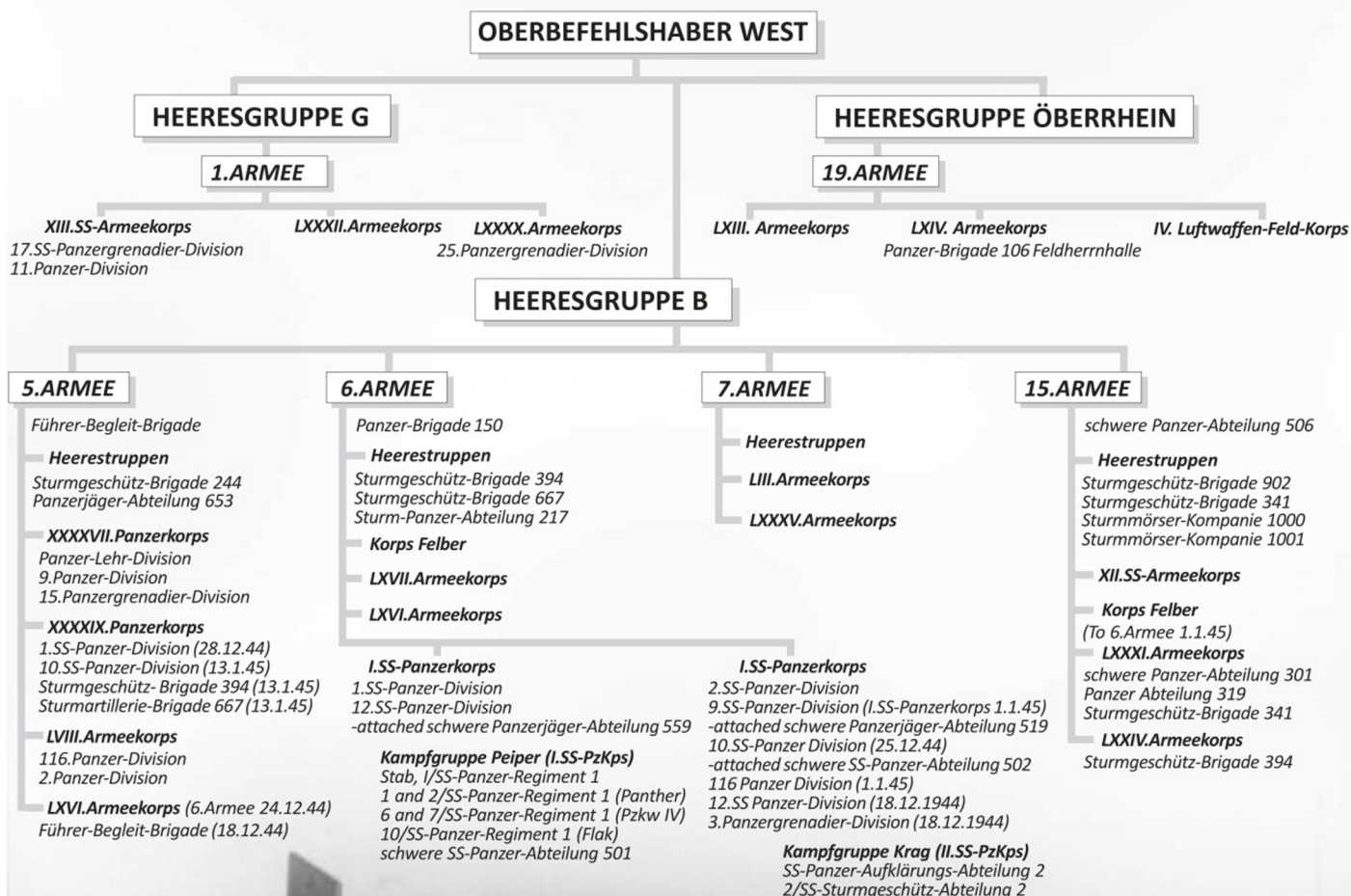
This photograph shows a Bergepanzer III recovery vehicle and although it has quite obviously been taken at the same time as the photograph shown above, there is no record of 9. Panzer-Division having any of these vehicles on hand. One possible candidate is 15. Panzergrenadier-Division which did operate in this area and had five of these vehicles on strength prior to the battle. (NARA)





## THE GERMAN ARMOUR IN THE WEST, DECEMBER 1944

The German armed forces suffered almost three-quarters of a million casualties between June and November 1944 in the defensive fighting in Normandy and the subsequent withdrawal across France. Although the Army had been able to re-inforce many of its units with personnel from the Kriegsmarine, the Luftwaffe, by extending the call-up age to all males between 16 and 60 years of age and by conscripting men who had previously been exempt as essential to the war effort, these new recruits were poorly trained. Such measures did however, allow the Army to increase its manpower strength on the Western Front from less than half a million at the beginning of December to almost one and a half million by the middle of the month. Despite their best efforts, the Germans could not hope to match the numerical superiority of the Allies who still enjoyed a two-to-one advantage in artillery and a twenty-to-one advantage in tanks. Crucially, the British and Americans could call on almost 14,000 combat aircraft - while the Luftwaffe had almost been completely driven from the sky. By December 1944, the German Army in the West was organized into four separate Heeresgruppen or army groups. Three of these army groups - Heeresgruppe H, B and G - were commanded by Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt, while a fourth - Heeresgruppe Oberrhein - came under the command of Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler. The strongest of these army groups was Generalfeldmarschall Model's Heeresgruppe B which would provide the main strike force for the planned operation codenamed Wacht am Rhein - the Ardennes Offensive. Note that the order of battle shown below details armoured units only.



A Sturmgeschütz III ausf G of 3. Panzergrenadier-Division lies damaged and abandoned near Bastogne during the Ardennes Offensive. The division's unit insignia can be seen on the hull rear plate to the left of the vehicle's number. The practice of displaying the tactical number at the front and rear of the vehicle - as opposed to the sides - was common within this division. (NARA)





*A Jagdpanzer IV/70(V) possibly from SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 of 1.SS-Panzer-Division photographed near the Belgium-Luxembourg border between Bastogne and Wiltz. The so-called ambush style of camouflage pattern is quite clearly shown here. (NARA)*



*A Volkswagen type 82 car - nicknamed the Kübelwagen or bucket car - abandoned in a Belgium village, apparently intact and perhaps even in running order. Reliable and hardy, the Americans judged these vehicles to be the equal of the Jeep in all aspects except comfort. (NARA)*



Below: An Sdkfz 250 of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 146 of 116. Panzer-Division photographed in Samrée, Belgium approximately 30 kilometres south of Liège in January 1945. The tactical symbol on the hull front, above the vehicle registration number, identifies a motorised anti-tank company. (NARA). At left is shown the rank insignia of an Unteroffizier, the two pieces of horizontal braid denoting an officer candidate, with a metal gothic P identifying an anti-tank unit and the metal Totenkopf badge of the Panzer troops. (Author's collection)



At left: A Pzkw IV ausf H knocked out in Belgium during the winter of 1944/45. Below: These vehicles were badly damaged and abandoned near the town of Inden, 25 kilometres northeast of Aachen, during the heavy fighting which took place there in late November 1944 - although they were actually photographed in 1947. Both are from 3. Panzergrenadier-Division, the Sturmgeschütz III belonging to 1. Kompanie, Panzer-Abteilung 3 and the Jagdpanzer IV is from 1. Kompanie, Panzerjäger-Abteilung 103. (NARA)





A Sturmgeschütz III auf G photographed - as the sign states - 3 kilometres from St Vith. Although the official caption gives this location as Hummange, it is almost certainly Hünningen, a village to the north of St Vith which would strongly suggest that this assault gun is from Panzerjäger-Abteilung 673 of the Führer-Begleit-Brigade. The photograph below shows A Pzkw VI Tiger II of 1.Kompanie, schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506. In the original print a number 1 is visible to the left of the Balkankreuz and this is in keeping with the system used by this battalion. The location has been variously described as Villers-la-Bonne-Eau, Lutramange or Moinet. The first is a road system and small village roughly 7 kilometres south east of Bastogne, while the second is a larger town less than a kilometre to the northeast of Villers-la-Bonne-Eau. The town of Moinet is much further to the north and closer to Oberwampach in Luxembourg and in this area the battalion was forced to abandon one Tiger I and two Tiger II tanks on 17 January. There is today a small farm called Moinet near Lutramange and although it is far from certain that it existed in 1945, the road north from Villers-la-Bonne-Eau to Lutramange does seem the most likely location. This tank may therefore be one of the two lost on 13 January to units of the US 6th Armoured Division which was indeed operating in the area to the south of Bastogne. (NARA)





Although a rare site in 1944, some of these Sdkfz 233 schwere Panzerspähwagen armoured cars soldiered on until the war's end. This vehicle from 2. Panzer-Division was photographed near Celles in December 1944 and is shown and discussed further in the illustration section on page 17. At the front of the hull, above the towing hook, can be seen the division's unit insignia and the tactical sign denoting an armoured car platoon. (NARA)



Photographed in January 1945, this Pzkw V Panther ausf G was used to test the efficacy of the 90mm anti-tank shell. Of interest are the three bolts welded towards the rear of the turret - presumably there is another set supporting the length of spare track. Note how the impact of the 90mm shells has caused the zimmerit anti-magnetic mine paste to fall away in large, rectangular segments. (NARA)





Photographed in Wallendorf on the Luxembourg-German border 20 kilometres southwest of Bitburg on 21 February 1945, these two Sturmgeschütz III auf G assault guns may have been knocked out by a heavy artillery barrage. No identifying markings are visible, except the Balkankreuz on the rear of the nearest vehicle, however both Panzerjäger-Abteilung 38 of 2. Panzer-Division and Panzerjäger-Abteilung 212 of 212. Volks-Grenadier-Division were both involved in the fighting for this area and both were equipped with this type of vehicle. (NARA)



This photograph was also taken on the Luxembourg-German border at Dasburg, some 20 kilometres to the north and just one week later on 28 February 1945. The vehicles nearest the camera are a Sturmgeschütz III auf G and a Pzkw V Bergepanther recovery vehicle. (NARA)







An Sdkfz 10/4 2cm Flak 38 half-track photographed near Frauwüllesheim, 30 kilometres east of Aachen, on 28 February 1945. In the original print of this photograph it is possible to see that the gun, including the inside of the gun shield, has been painted in a camouflage pattern consisting of large patches of a darker colour. By this time many of these vehicles had semi-armoured cabs. (NARA). At left is the army anti-aircraft combat badge - or Heeres-Flak Kampfabzeichen - awarded to the crews of anti-aircraft guns and also searchlight and sound ranging troops. The award was based on a rather complicated points system and perhaps incongruously, actions against ground targets were not considered acceptable criteria. (Author's collection)



Photographed near Mödrath a suburb of Kerpen, some 15 kilometres east of Düren, in early March 1945, these two Sturmgeschütz III ausf G are almost certainly from 2 Kompanie, Panzer-Abteilung 103 of 3. Panzergrenadier-Division which defended this area in late February and early March. The lead vehicle is also shown and discussed in the illustration section on page 18. (NARA)





**Sdkfz 251/1 ausf D. Panzergrenadier Bataillon 2108, Panzer-Brigade 108. France, late 1944.** This half-track and four others were captured by the US Army and converted to carry the T-34 Calliope rocket system. Both the number 2311 and name of a former crew member - Heinrich Hötger, killed in September 1944 - are repeated on the right side of the hull in exactly the same style. The Shark insignia was also carried at the rear on the right hand side mudguard.



**3.7cm Flak 43 auf schwere Werhmachtsschlepper. Unknown unit. France, late 1944.** Developed as a transport vehicle by Büssing-NAG in 1943, less than 1,000 of these vehicles were built in both an armoured and un-armoured version as shown here. Only the armoured version however was fitted with the 3.7cm anti-aircraft gun in production, the rest being field modifications. A large white letter G was painted inside the gun shield just above the barrel and probably indicated a Batterie.



**Sturmgeschütz III auf G. Unit unknown. France, late 1944.** Photographed near Thionville which was part of the Metz defensive system, this assault gun may have belonged to Panzerjäger-Abteilung 119 of 19.Volksgrenadier-Division.



**Sdkfz 251/6 ausf C. Unit uncertain. Belgium, December 1944.** Photographed near Jodenville, 7 kilometres south-west of Bastogne, this command half-track may be from the Panzer-Lehr-Division which was operating there at that time. At left is an example of the method used to display the division's unit insignia or Truppenkennzeichen, in late 1944 and early 1945.







Right: The unit insignia of the Führer-Begleit-Brigade. It is uncertain which vehicles, if any, carried the marking during the fighting in the Ardennes.

**Panzer IV/70(A). Führer-Begleit-Brigade. Belgium, December 1944.** Part of this unit's armoured component was formed from II Abteilung, Panzer Regiment Grossdeutschland which had 38 of these vehicles on hand in December.



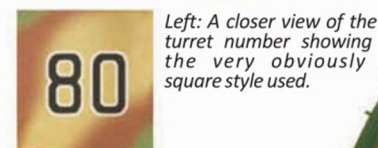
Above: An enlarged view of the style and colours used to depict the turret number of the Panther shown at right. The white, broken outline and solid black centre were common to all the tanks of the regiment's I Abteilung. The number was repeated in the same style, but at approximately half size, on the turret rear just below the commander's cupola and level with the access door.

**Pzkw V Panther ausf G. 2 Kompanie, I Abteilung, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Belgium, December 1944.** Knocked out at Stoumont about 15 kilometres west of Malmedy this tank was photographed from several different angles providing us with a good overall view of the camouflage scheme - indicative of Panthers produced by Daimler Benz in September 1944 - and markings.

**Sdkfz 234/2 Puma. Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 2. Belgium, December 1944.** During the Ardennes Offensive this unit had 10 of these vehicles on hand as part of Kampfgruppe von Böhm - the advance guard of 2. Panzer-Division - made up of this battalion and a number of Panthers. Cut off near Dinant fewer than 200 men escaped and all heavy equipment had to be abandoned with Hauptmann von Böhm and 148 of his men were taken prisoner.



Above: The unit insignia - or Truppenkennzeichen - of 2. Panzer-Division. Also of note is the Truppe number 8 painted in white on the mudguard between the first and second wheel. Apparently vehicles of this unit whose turret number ended in 1 had white numbers while those that ended in 2 used a dark colour, possibly black.



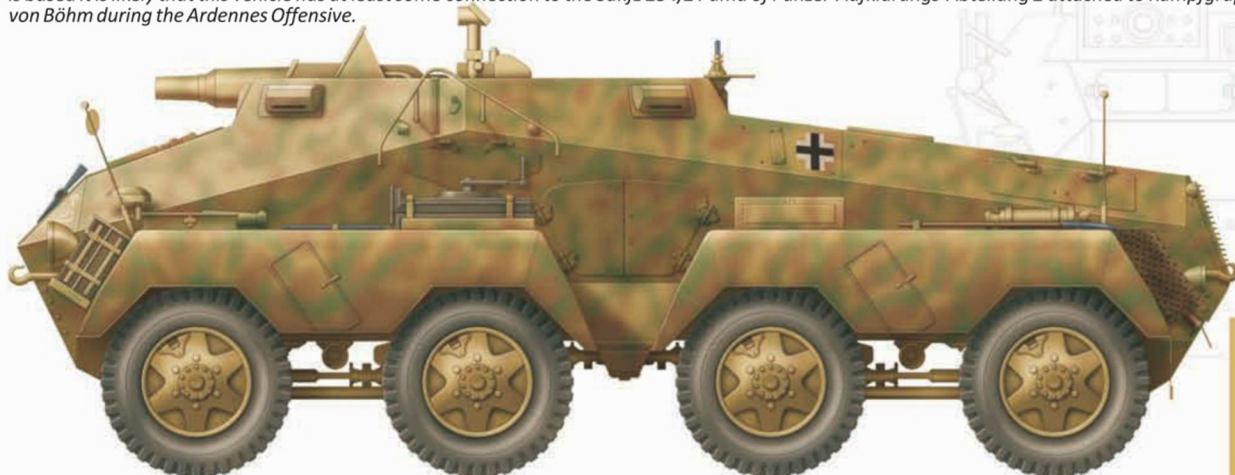
Left: A closer view of the turret number showing the very obviously square style used.



**Pzkw V Panther ausf G. Panzer Regiment 33, 9. Panzer-Division. Belgium, December 1944.** Abandoned on the outskirts of Humain, some 30 kilometres northwest of Bastogne, this tank was subsequently towed to the centre of the town and photographed from several different angles. The regiment had 57 Panthers available on 14 December and all were concentrated in II Abteilung. The number 80 almost certainly denotes the battalion's 8th company and may identify the company commander.



**Sdkfz 233 (7.5 cm) Schwere Panzerspähwagen. 2. Panzer-Division. Belgium, late 1944.** The first of these vehicles had been received by the division in May 1943 and it is possible that this heavy armoured car may be one of those. Given the date and location of the photograph on which our illustration is based it is likely that this vehicle has at least some connection to the Sdkfz 234/2 Puma of Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 2 attached to Kampfgruppe von Böhm during the Ardennes Offensive.



**Sturmgeschütz III ausf G. Possibly 5 Kompanie, Panzerjäger-Abteilung 61, 11. Panzer-Division. Germany, early 1945.** The possible identification of this vehicle is based on the location at which it was photographed - in the Hunsrück area of western Germany - the style of marking and the assumption that any other possible candidates would have been unlikely to have fielded a 5th company. By January 1945 the battalion had lost all but two of its assault guns.



Above: The 2. Panzer-Division unit insignia and the tactical sign denoting an armoured car platoon.

Below: The unit insignia of the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade. The connection of this unit and the Führer-Begleit-Brigade with the Grossdeutschland division is emphasised in its design.

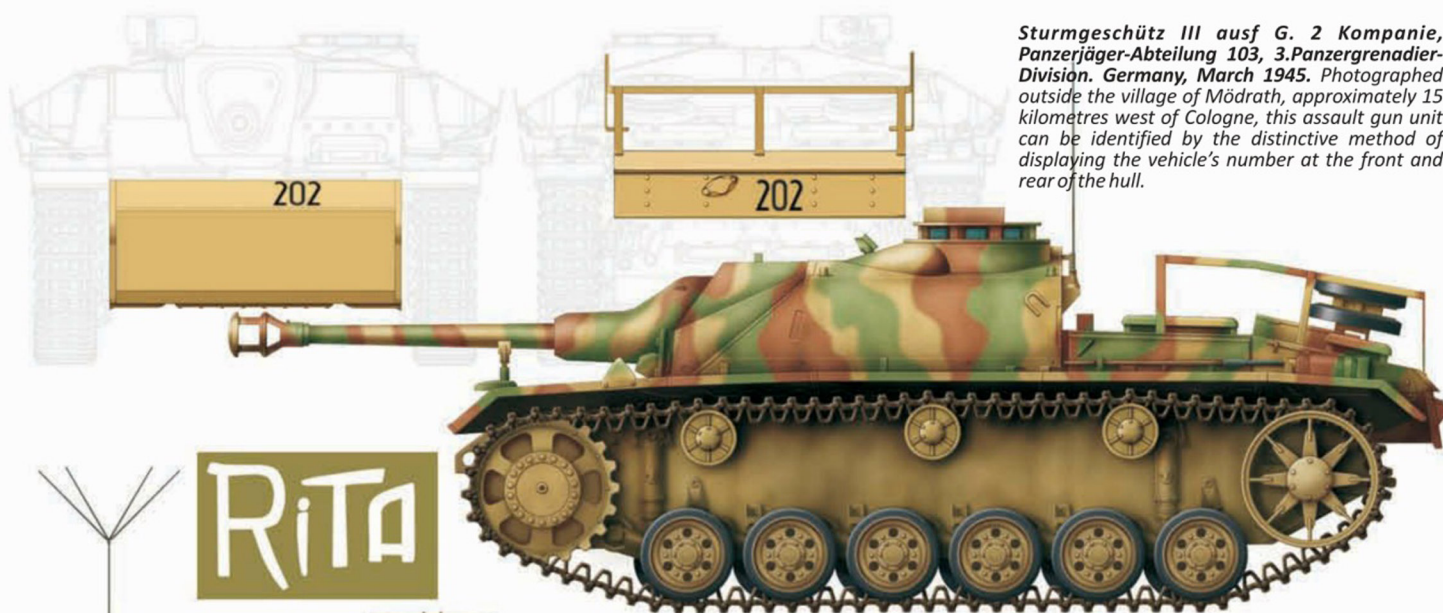


**Sdkfz 251/17. Führer-Grenadier-Brigade. Luxembourg, December 1944.** A number of these 2cm armed half-tracks and several assault guns were destroyed in an attack on the town of Heiderscheid approximately 20 kilometres south-east of Bastogne. The number 214 is somewhat speculative, only the first two digits being visible in our photograph.

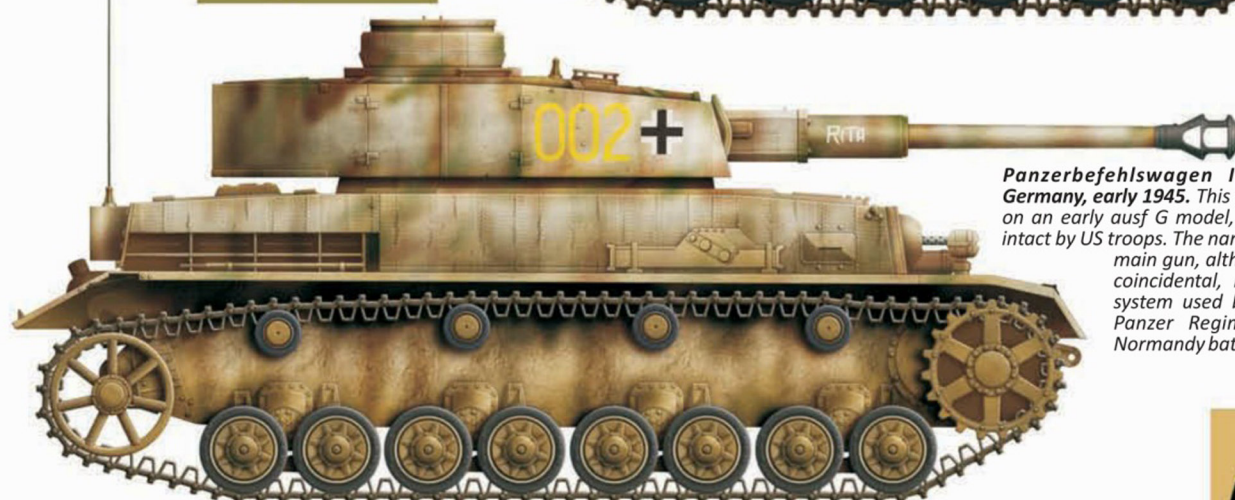


**Pzkw VI Tiger I. Unit uncertain. Germany, Spring 1945.** Abandoned between the towns of Detmold and Berlebeck - almost certainly on the Paderborner Strasse - this battered Tiger I may belong to Panzer Gruppe Paderborn. This unit was formed in March 1945 from the tanks of Panzer-Lehr und Ausbildungs-Abteilung Tiger, a training unit, which was able to field 15 Tiger I and 3 Tiger II tanks. By 12 April all the unit's vehicles had either been destroyed or abandoned.

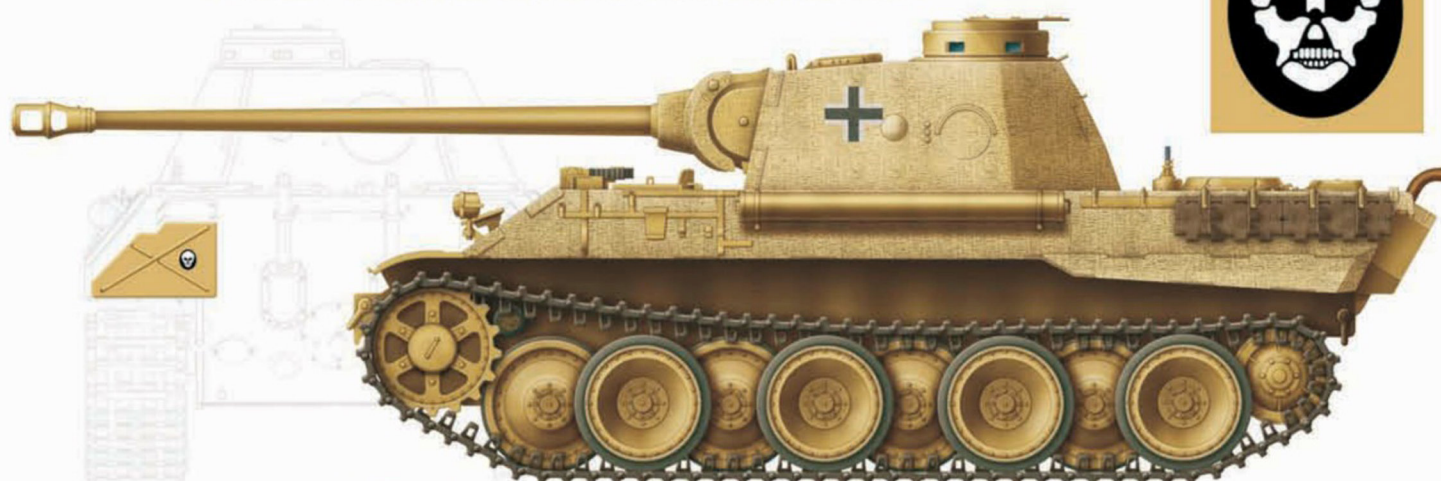




**Sturmgeschütz III ausf G. 2 Kompanie, Panzerjäger-Abteilung 103, 3. Panzergrenadier-Division. Germany, March 1945.** Photographed outside the village of Mödrath, approximately 15 kilometres west of Cologne, this assault gun unit can be identified by the distinctive method of displaying the vehicle's number at the front and rear of the hull.



**Panzerbefehlswagen IV. Unit unknown. Germany, early 1945.** This command tank, based on an early ausf G model, was captured almost intact by US troops. The name RITA painted on the main gun, although almost certainly coincidental, is reminiscent of the system used by II Abteilung of SS-Panzer Regiment 12 during the Normandy battles.



**Pzkw V Panther ausf D. Unit uncertain. Germany, spring 1945.** Photographed in the streets of Bamberg this early model Panther may belong to Panzer-Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Abteilung 35. The markings certainly resemble those used on other Panthers of the unit which was based in that area. Note the skull insignia painted on the rear stowage bin. The enlarged view is necessarily speculative as the image is unclear in the photograph on which our illustration is based.



**Pzkw III. Panzer-Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Abteilung 35. Germany, spring 1945.** Photographed in company with several other older tanks in the ruins of the battalion's workshop this vehicle is also shown and discussed on page 23.



Both photographs on this page show the same Panzer IV/70(A) in the streets of the small town of Mittlewihr, just north of Colmar, in France. This vehicle was knocked out when 7. Kompanie, Panzer Regiment 2, which had been attached to Panzer-Brigade 106 Feldherrnhalle, attempted to take the town in December 1944. The wire mesh skirt or Drahtgeflecht Schürzen is missing from the driver's side of the vehicle although the skirt for the other side is still in place. In the original print of both photographs it is possible to discern a solid black Balkenkreuz at the very top of the crew compartment, to the right of the gun mantlet. The ferocity of the fighting here, which lasted until January 1945 is evident in the destruction shown in these photographs and indeed only a small part of the town's medieval church and a wall at the entry of the village are all that remain today. (NARA)





Photographed in Baden on 7 March 1945, these two Sdkfz 251/1 ausf D half-tracks are being used as transport by their new owners, men of the US 5th Infantry Division. In the original print of this photograph a number beginning with 6 and possibly followed by a 3, is just visible to the rear of the Jerrycan on the hull side of the nearest vehicle. (NARA)



The official caption of this photograph states that this 15cm Panzerwerfer 42 auf Maultier was one of six captured near the village of Fussingen by units of the US 7th Armoured Division. The division swept through this area on 26 March advancing almost 25 kilometres reaching the Dillenburg-Wetzlar road, approximately 60 kilometres north of Frankfurt, by the evening of the next day. Although it is not possible to identify the unit, 16.Volks-Werfer-Brigade had been attached to LXVI. Armeekorps, the closest German formation to 7th Armoured Division's advance, since December 1944 when the brigade had 12 of these vehicles on hand and although the brigade staff had been transferred further north on 23 March, some units may still have been in the area. (NARA)





This Pzkw V Panther ausf G was photographed in the town of Kelberg, approximately 30 kilometres west of Koblenz on 11 March 1945. The town was captured on 3 March by units of the US 11th Armoured Division and according to the American account, was defended by six German tanks including one Tiger II. In early March, General von Manteuffel's 5. Panzerarmee was retreating through this area and this Panther may have belonged to either 2. Panzer-Division, 9. Panzer-Division or 3. Panzergrenadier-Division. The only unit on the Western Front equipped with the Tiger II at this time, schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506, was however fighting much further to the north. (NARA)



At left: A page from the Pantherfibel, an instruction manual produced for trainee Panther crews which imparted technical information in an often light hearted manner. Here a gunner is presenting the tank's 7.5cm gun to Saint Barbara, the patron saint of the artillery. Also shown is the Panzer Marksman's badge which was normally reserved for parades and worn with a corded lanyard at the right shoulder. At the rear is the Metz campaign cuff title instituted on 24 October 1944 and awarded to any soldier who had served for at least seven days with Kampfgruppe Siegroth, which had defended the city, or was wounded during the siege. (Author's collection)

Photographed in Haiger east of Cologne on 29 March 1945, this Pzkw V Panther ausf G was part of an ad hoc force coordinated by the headquarters of General Bayerlein's LIII Corps and was made up from parts of 176. Infanterie-Division, 3. Panzergrenadier-Division and Panzer-Lehr-Division - the latter having only ten of these tanks on hand at the time. (NARA)







A 7.5 cm PaK (Panzerabwehrkanone) 40, dug in and heavily camouflaged, sighted to cover a flat, open field. These guns were capable of engaging and destroying Allied tanks at ranges of up to 1,800 metres and could be easily concealed, as shown here. The German army relied heavily on these weapons and during the surge in armament production that took place between January and September 1944, over 7,000 were allocated to units. Note that a considerable amount of whitewash camouflage remains despite the fact that it is obviously not needed and although it is difficult to be certain, it appears that the gun's wheels have been removed. (NARA)

Although it is generally agreed that this Sturmgeschütz IV assault gun was knocked out by units of the US 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion, there is some controversy regarding the date and the location of this photograph with some sources giving January 1945 near Rimling and others, 9 March near Helfengerhoff. The official caption agrees with the March date but gives Brandelfengerhoff as the location. The date of this photograph is plainly not January, when the ground was covered in snow. On 2 March, in support of the US 200th Division, the battalion was near Bitche in France less than 10 kilometres from the German border with US intelligence reports placing 17.SS-Panzer Grenadier-Division less than a kilometre away at Schorbach. A few kilometres to the north, across the German border there are a multitude of towns named in the Helfengerhoff-Brandelfengerhoff style - although I have not been able to locate an exact match anywhere in Germany. The only other unit thought to have had any serviceable Sturmgeschütz IV at this time, Panzer Regiment 3 of 2.Panzer-Division, was far to the north near Wittlich. This would strongly suggest that this vehicle - named Kunigunde, a girl's name - did belong to SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 17. (NARA)







Both photographs on this page depict Jagdpanzer 38(t) Hetzer tank destroyers, almost certainly from the same unit, knocked out near the fortress town of Bitche, some 40 kilometres southeast of Saarbrücken in early March 1945. Although there are no identifying markings on either vehicle, the only unit close to the town at that time equipped with the Hetzer was the Sturmgeschütz company of Panzerjäger-Abteilung(mot) 1316 from 16.Volks-Grenadier-Division which had originally been issued with 14 of these diminutive tank destroyers in early December. The factory applied camouflage is typical of vehicles manufactured by the Boemisch-Mährische Maschinenfabrik works and visible in the original print of this photograph, just to the left of the damaged Nettek headlight is a matte black rectangle which, from October 1944, was painted on the hull in an effort to decoy enemy gunners away from the drivers visor and vision block. (NARA)



Photographed in Bamberg, inside the very heavily damaged workshop of Panzer- Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Abteilung 35, can be seen a Pzkw V Panther ausf D, a Pzkw IV ausf G and - closest to the camera - an early Pzkw III which is too badly damaged to categorize accurately. Interestingly the latter is fitted with a turret from a Tauchpanzer - tanks which were modified to run underwater - identified by the flange around the bottom edge of the turret. This vehicle is also shown in the illustration section on page 18. This battalion was the training and replacement unit of Panzer Regiment 35 of 4. Panzer-Division and attempted to defend the town of Bamberg from approaching US units with veteran tanks such as these in April 1945. (NARA)





#### TIMELINE

21.10.44. Aachen is captured, earning the distinction of being the first German city to fall to the Western Allies. On the same day Breskens is captured by the Canadians.

28.10.44. All eligible Germans are ordered to enroll in Volksturm or face court-martial.

31.10.44. British units reach the river Maas, south of Rotterdam and establish a bridgehead.

01.11.44. British units land on Walcheren in the Scheldt Estuary.

02.11.44. US Army units move to attack the Roer Dams defended by remnants of 275. Infanterie-Division.

04.11.44. Elements of 116. Panzer-Division begin counter attacks against US units in the Roer dam region between Kommerscheidt and Vossenack.

06.11.44. A surprise assault by Panzergrenadier Regiment 60 of 116. Panzer-Division breaks US defences at Vossenack. Middelburg surrenders.

07.11.44. Kampfgruppe Bayer - formed around Panzer Regiment 16 and Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 341 - recaptures Kommerscheidt.

09.11.44. The last German units on Walcheren surrender. The Moerdijk bridgehead across the Meuse river is evacuated.

10.11.44. First Volksturm unit in action in the west.

11.11.44. German 1. Armee headquarters leaves Metz as US units capture three bridgeheads over the Moselle.

16.11.44. US Army units launch an attack to the east of Aachen.

17.11.44. German units including elements of 9. Panzer-Division and schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506 with 33 Tigers counterattack towards Puffendorf south-east of Geilenkirchen.

18.11.44. The US 3rd Army crosses the German frontier. Metz is now cut off.

19.11.44. Panzer Abteilung (Funklenk) 301 and Panzer Kompanie (Funklenk) 319 counterattack near Merzenhausen destroying several American tanks. German units including 15. Panzergrenadier-Division and Panzer Kompanie Hummel counterattack near Tripsrath north of Geilenkirchen. US units fight their way into the suburbs of Metz. The French 1st Armoured Division reaches the Rhine.

23.11.44. 12. Volksgrenadier-Division attempts to retake Pützlohn. The attack is supported by the Tigers of Panzer-Abteilung (Funklenk) 301, using demolition carriers, and III Abteilung, Panzergrenadier Regiment 29.

24.11.44. The allies cross the Saar near the German border.

28.11.44. The US 9th Army reaches the Roer.

03.12.44. US troops penetrate the Westwall near Saarlautern.

06.12.44. The Autobahn bridge near Birkesdorf is destroyed by Borgward demolition carriers of Panzer-Abteilung (Funklenk) 301.

08.12.44. German troops evacuate Jülich on the Roer river.

10.12.44. Hagenau and Saargemünd are captured.

12.12.44. The V-weapon factory at Wittling is captured.

13.12.44. German 7. Armee withdraws into the fortified positions of the Westwall.



Photographed in the village of Bliessen, between Oberthal and St Wendel on 19 March 1945, this Volkswagen Kübelwagen may have belonged to one of the units of 6. SS-Gebirgsjäger-Division Nord which retreated through this area in late February and early March. (NARA)

Panzerjäger V Jagdpanther of schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654 knocked out in one of the open fields around Hargarten, some 25 kilometres north of Bitburg. This battalion was under the direct control of Heeresgruppe G during the Nordwind operation and suffered heavy casualties. By February 1945, the battalion had been reduced to six serviceable tank destroyers. (NARA)





An abandoned Pzkw V Panther ausf A is used as cover by soldiers of the US 4th Cavalry Group on 2 March 1945. The official caption gives the location as Flesch, however I have been unable to locate a similarly named town in western Germany and this may in fact be Frechen just outside Cologne which was, according to the published US 12th Army Group situation map for 2 March, right on the front line. If the German dispositions recorded on the map are correct, this tank is probably from Panzer Regiment 33 of 9.Panzer-Division. (NARA)



This Pzkw V Panther ausf G from Panzer Regiment 15 of 11.Panzer-Division was photographed near Fernegierscheid in early April 1945. This division was part of the counterattack against the Remagen bridgehead which began on 23 March. In mid March, prior to the fighting around Remagen, the division reported that its armoured strength had been reduced to 33 of these Panther tanks together with 17 Pzkw IV tanks and 6 assault guns. The town of Fernegierscheid is approximately 20 kilometres northeast of Remagen. (NARA)



#### TIMELINE

16.12.44. The German Army launches Wacht am Rhein, the last major operation in the west. Achieving complete surprise, the German offensive manages to break through the American line on a 70 mile front. Lanzerath is occupied by elements of 3.Fallschirmjäger-Division. Although the attack has penetrated deep into the US lines, difficult terrain and poor weather hamper the German units and ominously none reach their assigned objectives for the first day.

17.12.44. In the early morning 18.Volksgrenadier-Division reaches Schönberg, 10 kilometres from St Vith. Kampfgruppe Peiper begins its drive towards Buchholz and 12.Volksgrenadier-Division takes Losheimergraben.

18.12.44. Kampfgruppe Peiper reaches La Gleize. Chauveheid comes under attack from Tigers of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501. After several attempts to capture Krinkett, 12.SS-Panzer-Division moves to bypass the town. The commands of both 6.Armee and 5.Armee report shortages of fuel.

19.12.44. US units come under attack at Dom Bütgenbach by 12.SS-Panzer-Division.

20.12.44. Units of 6.Armee capture Stavelot.

21.12.44. Although US units retake Stavelot, Bastogne is besieged and 5.Armee captures St. Vith. 12.SS-Panzer-Division abandon attempts to take Dom Bütgenbach.

18.Volksgrenadier-Division supported by several Tigers of schwere Panzer-Abteilung 506 attacks along the Schönberg road.

22.12.44. Skorzeny's Panzer-Brigade 150 attacks Malmedy but is beaten off. Kampfgruppe von Böhm - formed around the reconnaissance battalion of 2.Panzer-Division - breaches the American line and advances towards Buissonville and Achen.

24.12.44. Troops of Kampfgruppe Poschinger - made up of units from Panzer-Lehr-Division - enter Rochefort by stealth and after heavy fighting take the town. Buissonville is retaken by the Americans.

25.12.44. The 2.Panzer-Division is halted just four miles from the river Meuse. Kampfgruppe von Böhm is surrounded and destroyed despite a relief effort carried out by units of 9.Panzer-Division.

26.12.44. Bastogne is relieved.

30.12.44. German units launch a heavy attack on the Bastogne corridor in the Ardennes. The British attack on Houffalize is halted by bitter German resistance.

31.12.44. At 23.00 hours two German army groups, Heeresgruppe G and Heeresgruppe Oberrhein, launch Operation Nordwind towards Strasbourg. The main assault is led by 17.SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division and 36.Volksgrenadier-Division against US positions in the Saar valley.

03.01.45. US counter attacks begin on the northern side of the Ardennes salient.

04.01.45. In bitter fighting elements of 6.SS-Gerirgsjäger-Division capture the town of Wingen-sur-Moder.

05.01.45. With Nordwind bogged down, a supplementary operation codenamed Sonnenwende begins. Kampfgruppe Lutichau - consisting of a company of Pzkw IV tanks from Panzer Regiment 2, two companies of tank destroyers and three companies of Jagdpanzer 38(t) Hetzers - with Grenadier Regiment 1119 and several ad hoc units under the orders of Heeresgruppe Oberrhein, manage to create a bridgehead on the Rhine between Strasbourg and Hagenau.





Photographed in the heavily damaged railway yard at Aschaffenburg these Pzkw V Panther turrets were probably being transported in this manner to be used as Pantherstellung fixed emplacements. The turret would be mounted on the purpose built Of-Stahlunterstand, basically a metal bunker, which was then buried. Note the elaborate camouflage pattern on the nearest turret. This town in Bavaria was the scene of a particularly savage battle between 28 March and 3 April 1945. The defence was undertaken by various ad hoc units made up from men of the Volsturm and Waffen-SS. (NARA)



A Panzer IV/70(A) sits by the roadside in Ober Bessenbach, less than 5 kilometres southwest of Aschaffenburg. This photograph was taken on the morning of 1 April 1945, only hours after the town was captured. (NARA)

#### TIMELINE

- 06.01.45. As part of Operation Nordwind, 21.Panzer-Division begins an attack south from Wissembourg.
- 08.01.45. German units are given permission to withdraw from the Ardennes salient leaving as a rearguard parts of 340.Volksgranadier-Division and tanks of schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 501.
- 09.01.45. Kampfgruppe Feuchtinger - effectively the remnants of 21.Panzer-Division and 25.Panzergranadier-Division - begin attacks against Hatten, south of Oldenburg as part of Nordwind.
- 12.01.45. Operation Nordwind is halted 13 miles from Strasbourg. British and U.S. forces link up in the Laroche area.
- 16.01.45. 10.SS-Panzer-Division spearheads the drive south from Lauterbourg through Seltz, 2 miles west of the Rhine River, in an attempt to seize the Gamsheim bridgehead.
- 17.01.45. 10.SS-Panzer-Division in action at Herrlisheim, south of Hagenau.
- 22.01.45. Heeresgruppe G and Heeresgruppe Oberrhein link up but are unable to force a crossing of the Moder River.
- 28.01.45. The last German units withdraw from the Ardennes salient.
- 04.02.45. The last German troops leave Belgium.
- 07.02.45. The Germans destroy the floodgates in the Ruhr, flooding the area West of Cologne and preventing the use of assault bridges.
- 08.02.45. British and Canadian troops launch an offensive into the Reichswald.
- 09.02.45. The last Rhine bridge is destroyed in the Colmar Pocket after much of 19.Armee had been evacuated.
- 10.02.45. US units capture the last of the Ruhr dams.
- 12.02.45. British and Canadian troops capture Cleve.
- 17.02.45. The US 3rd Army breaks through the Siegfried Line and advances into Germany.
- 23.02.45. US 9th Army attacks from the Roer bridgehead towards the Hürtgen Forest but is bogged down in savage fighting.
- 28.02.45. US units in the Hürtgen Forest break through near Erkelenz, west of Cologne at great cost.
- 06.03.45. Cologne surrenders.
- 07.03.45. The Rhine bridge at Remagen captured intact.
- 09.03.45. The US Third Army captures Andernach on the Rhine.
- 10.03.45. Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring replaces von Rundstedt as Oberbefehlshaber West.
- 12.02.45. Kampfgruppe Dunker - formed from Feld-Ersatz-Bataillon 3 and stragglers from 116.Panzer-Division - attempts to defend Beckum with four Tigers rendered inoperable due to lack of fuel.
- 14.03.45. US 3rd Army crosses the Moselle.
- 15.03.45. Attempts to expand the Remagen bridgehead fail.
- 17.03.45. The Remagen bridge collapses.
- 20.03.45. Saarbrücken falls.
- 21.03.45. US units advance from Remagen toward Siegburg.
- 22.03.45. Units of the US 3rd Army cross the Rhine at Oppenheim south of Mainz against ineffective German resistance.
- 23.03.45. British and Canadian units begin their assault across the Rhine above the Ruhr.
- 24.03.45. Panzergruppe Hude's counterattack near Eitorf east of Bonn fails. The British launch operation Plunder. US troops capture Speyer and Ludwigshafen.
- 25.03.45. British troops capture Wesel after an aerial bombardment almost completely destroys the town.





Photographed in Osterode on 12 April 1945, this Pzkw VI Tiger II of schwere Panzer-Abteilung 507 has been damaged by an anti-tank round - the point of impact being visible on the turret side just behind the spare tracks. Given the location and date, this is probably one of the 3. Kompanie Tigers attached to SS-Panzer Brigade Westfalen between 30 March and 11 April 1945. Although US sources suggest that this tank was knocked out by a 90mm round it is difficult to envisage any large weapon being fired in the narrow confines of this street - Dörgerstrasse. At least one source (Schneider) states that this vehicle had broken down outside the Gasthof due to track damage and was abandoned there. However, in the following days the tank was photographed from several angles and in all photos the tracks appear intact. (NARA)



A 15cm Nebelwerfer 41 towed by the purpose built SdKfz 11/4 Nebelkraftwagen lies abandoned outside the Hotel Rheinkrone in Andernach on the Rhine approximately 5 kilometres north of Koblenz. The town fell to the US 3rd Army on 9 March 1945. (NARA)

#### TIMELINE

- 26.03.45. Main and Darmstadt fall to US troops
- 27.03.45. US Army units capture Aschaffenburg.
- 28.03.45. British troops begin their drive towards the Elbe as the US Army captures Marburg and Limburg.
- 30.03.45. Fighting as infantry, 160 men of the Panzer-Lehr und Ausbildungs-Abteilung Tiger based at Paderborn repel US attacks at Wewer, 2 kilometres outside the town.
- 01.04.45. Panzergruppe Paderborn - consisting of some 18 Tiger I, 9 Tiger II and assorted other tanks from the Panzer Schule Paderborn - attack US units at Nordborchen. Two US Armies link up at Lippstadt cutting off over 300,000 German troops in the Ruhr area.
- 02.04.45. The British 7th Armoured Division reaches the Dortmund-Ems canal.
- 03.04.45. US troops capture Recklinghausen, Fulda and Kassel.
- 04.04.45. German resistance in Kassel ceases. The British capture Osnabrück.
- 05.04.45. Karlsruhe on the upper Rhine falls to the Allies
- 07.04.45. Göttingen, Hameln and Eisenach are captured
- 08.04.45. The British reach Hildesheim.
- 09.04.45. Kampfgruppe Schulze - consisting of 5 Panther and 6 Tiger I tanks - attacks US positions near Wietersheim. The first attempt results in the loss of 4 Panthers and the second with the loss of 2 Tigers.
- 10.04.45. The British take Wildenhausen, southwest of Bremen. Hannover falls to the Americans.
- 11.04.45. Tanks and infantry of Kampfgruppe Grosan - including sailors from the 2. Marine-Division with two Tigers and a single Panther - attack British positions at Engehausen near Buchholz. They also manage to hold an enemy advance for two days. Weimar, Essen, Bochum and Goslar are captured by the Americans. The British take Celle, near Hannover, cutting the road to Hamburg. US Army units reach Schweinfurt.
- 13.04.45. The remaining tanks of Kampfgruppe Schulze attack a US command post at Baringhausen, west of Hannover. Panzer-Division Clausewitz attacks units of the British 15th Division in the area of Ülzen-Verssen inflicting heavy casualties. The US 3rd Army captures Erfurt.
- 14.04.45. Panther tanks and assault guns of Kampfgruppe Grosan attack British units at Ahlfen on the Halburger Strasse north of Soltau. Withdrawing through Bessel, one Tiger runs out of fuel and is left behind as a static defence position. The British reach Bremen. US units capture Gera and Bayreuth.
- 15.04.45. Arnhem is captured by the Canadians.
- 16.04.45. US 1st Army captures Solingen and Wuppertal.
- 17.04.45. British units attempt to outflank Soltau but are repulsed by the lone Tiger of Kampfgruppe Grosan left in Bessel.



An Sdkfz 11 HKL Abschlussausführung half-track. The German term translates literally as final version, however it was probably applied to vehicles to indicate a simplified model. These late production, cargo carrying vehicles were produced by converting Sdkfz 11/3 half-tracks which had originally been designed to deploy poison gas. (NARA)



Photographed just outside the town of Osterode am Harz, northeast of Kassel on 15 April 1945, this Pzkw VI Tiger II is quite probably the last tank of schwere Panzer-Abteilung 507, the partner of the Tiger shown at the top of page 27 which was photographed in the centre of the town. (NARA)



#### TIMELINE

18.04.45. The remaining serviceable Tiger of Kampfgruppe Grossman manages to halt the forward elements of the British 7th Armoured Division at Bispingen, 15 kilometres north of Soltau. Kampfgruppe Benningsen made up of units from Panzer-Division Clausewitz, drives the British from their positions around Wittingen. The US Army takes Magdeburg, Düsseldorf and Nürnberg. American units advance into Czechoslovakia. The British capture Ulzen and Lüneburg.

19.04.45. A single Tiger of Panzer-Division Clausewitz halts the advance of the British 3rd Royal Tank Regiment. British troops launch an attack on Bremen. Leipzig and Halle fall to the Americans

20.04.45. The U.S. Seventh Army takes Nuremberg.

21.04.45. Elements of Panzer-Division Clausewitz capture the Gifhorn-Brome road south of Wittingen, surprising US units who mistake them for Americans. French units capture Stuttgart taking 28,000 prisoners. German units continue to resist around Elbingerode in the Harz Mountains.

22.04.45. US 7th Army captures a bridge across the Danube. British troops reach Bremen.

23.04.45. Dessau is cleared of German troops. The British reach Harburg and Frankfurt is captured.

24.04.45. British and Canadian troops enter Bremen. US units cross the Danube at Dillingen and capture Ulm.

25.04.45. US and Soviet units meet on the Elbe at Torgau southwest of Berlin.

26.04.45. US troops take Regensburg on the Danube.

28.04.45. The Canadians capture Emden and Wilhelmshaven, while US units take Augsburg and reach the Austrian border.

29.04.45. British troops cross the Elbe near Hamburg. The US 7th Army reaches Munich.

30.04.1945. Hitler commits suicide appointing Grossadmiral Dönitz as his successor. US and Soviet units meet at Ellensburg, south of Berlin.

01.05.45. A single Tiger attached to Panzer-Division Clausewitz which had stoppped the British armoured advance near Wittingen again manages to halt a complete tank regiment outside Schwarzenbek. Encumbered with refugees, 12.Armee falls back to the Elbe. Its commander, General Wenck, negotiates his army's surrender with the Americans.

02.05.45. The British reach Lübeck.

03.05.45. General Wolz declares Hamburg an open city and surrenders to the British. U S troops reach the Brenner Pass on the Italian border.

04.05.45. Admiral von Friedeburg arrives at Field Marshal Montgomery's HQ to surrender all German forces in Holland, Northwest Germany and Denmark. The US 7th Army takes Innsbruck, Salzburg and Berchtesgaden.

05.05.45. The U.S. 3rd Army takes Pilsen and prepares to drive towards Prague.

07.05.45. Generaloberst Jodl as OKW Chief of Staff , signs Germany's unconditional surrender. All operations are to cease at 1 minute after midnight the next day.



## INSIGNIA OF THE PANZER ELITE

From 1943 the Wehrmacht's Panzer units were increasingly called upon to maintain or restore the front line. The army's armoured strike force was built around the veteran formations of the Blitzkrieg era and new divisions and brigades raised in 1944 and 1945. Many units were distinguished by insignia which either maintained traditions established by the Imperial Army or in many cases emphasised the link between the military and the National Socialist government. As the war progressed some elite units adopted semi-official devices such as the Windhund cap badge shown here on the right. The armoured units of the Waffen-SS would play a progressively more important role as the war ground to its end and although all the SS divisions wore cuff titles bearing their unit's name, the practice was greatly restricted within the Army. The wearing of cuff titles in the German military dated back to the mid-19th century and during the 1939-45 period, generally speaking, either identified an elite unit or signified service in a particular campaign.

At right: An Sdkfz 251 of 116. Panzer-Division passes a knocked out M10 tank destroyer during the fighting of late 1944. The division's famous Windhund, or greyhound, insignia can be clearly seen on the front of the vehicle. Below that is the tactical symbol denoting a tank platoon. Just visible on the band of the cap worn by the Officer at the centre of the photograph, is the Windhund badge worn by many members of the division. Also shown is the collar tab worn by Panzer troops and a variant of the Windhund cap badge. The latter was produced in several versions including one with a pin back.



Above, far left: The Grossdeutschland cuff title worn here by an NCO instructor photographed in 1945. At right, top to bottom: The Feldherrnhalle cuff title, worn in the west by the units of Panzer-Brigade 106. The army's Feldherrnhalle units adopted some of the traditions of the Sturm-Abteilung unit of the same name including the brown background colour of the cuff band and the Siegrune worn on the shoulder straps; The Grossdeutschland cuff title worn in the west by the Führer-Begleit-Brigade, the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade and later by Panzerjäger-Abteilung GD; The cuff title worn by units of 1.SS-Panzer-Division; The cuff title worn by members of 17.SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division. All are either embroidered or woven in silver for officers and grey for other ranks and all except the Feldherrnhalle cuff title are on a black band. At left: a) Enlisted ranks shoulder strap worn by the 1.SS-Panzer-Division. b) Shoulder strap for NCO's of the GD-Division, Führer-Begleit-Brigade and the Führer-Grenadier-Brigade. c) Oberleutnant of Panzer-Brigade 106. d) Major, Panzer-Lehr-Division. e) Panzer Assault badge, awarded for taking part in three armoured actions.



An assortment of Pzkw III tanks, including three ausf N models closest to the camera, all with coatings of zimmerit paste. These tanks are from Panzer-Abteilung Norwegen based in Oslo, Norway. This unit was originally formed from the 2nd and 3rd companies of I Abteilung, Panzer Regiment 9 of 25. Panzer-Division in September 1943. According to the official caption to this photograph, the battalion had 71 tanks on hand at the time of the German surrender. (NARA)



Photographed in the last days of the war, this Sdkfz 251/16 ausf D Flammpanzerwagen of 16. Panzer-Division is being used to transport refugees towards the American lines. This division retreated through Poland into Czechoslovakia and in the confused fighting of May 1945, some elements managed to reach the American lines. The division's unit insignia - probably in yellow - and the tactical symbol denoting a tank company - almost certainly in white - can be seen above and to the right of the vehicle's registration number. (NARA)



General der Panzertruppen Maximilian Freiberr von Edelsheim, commander of XXXXVIII Panzerkorps and officers of his staff, return to the east bank of the Elbe after receiving surrender terms from the Chief of Staff of the US 9th Army. Of note is the corps unit insignia painted on the side of the car and the notation - partly obscured - which reads: Gen.Kom XXXXVIII Pz Kps. This type of detailed identification - although obviously detrimental to security - was commonly seen late in the war and was not restricted to command or rear area vehicles. The small metal flag in front of the headlight also identifies a corps command. (NARA)



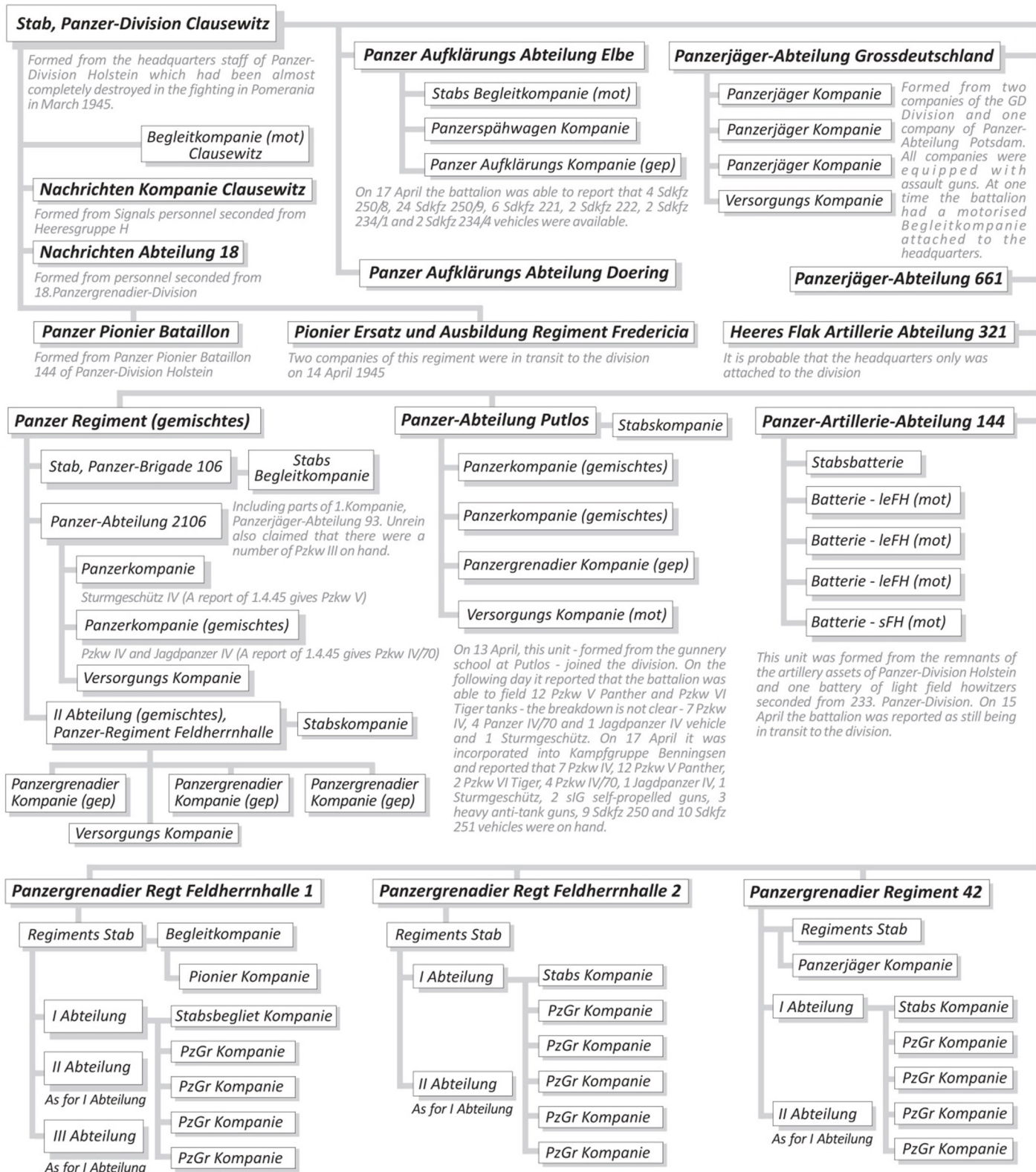
Officers of 116.Panzer-Division taken prisoner at Menden, south of Hamm, by troops of the US 7th Armoured Division including the division's Operations Officer, Oberst Heinz-Günther Guderian wearing the black uniform of the Panzer troops. The son of the famous Generaloberst Heinz Wilhelm Guderian, he served throughout the conflict being wounded twice during the 1940 French campaign. He survived the war and served as Inspector of Armoured troops - the same position held by his father - in the Bundeswehr before retiring in 1974. (NARA)





## CLAUSEWITZ, THE LAST PANZER DIVISION

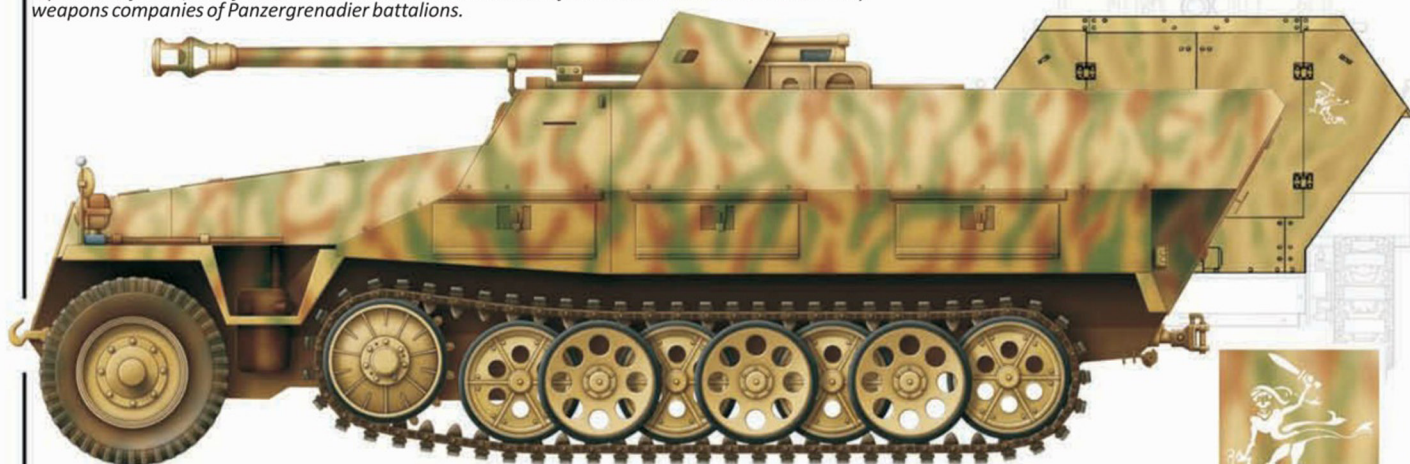
Ordered into existence on 4 April 1945, barely five weeks before the end of the war, Panzer-Division Clausewitz was typical of the ad-hoc formations created in the last months of the conflict. Incredibly, the division was expected to be ready for operations by 8 April and was originally to be formed from elements of a Panzer replacement unit and an anti-tank battalion from Panzergrenadier-Division Grossdeutschland with units of the 325. Infanterie-Division. However, both the armour and infantry units were engaged at the front and could not be spared. On 6 April, new orders were issued stating that Panzer-Division Clausewitz would be organised from remnants of various units. These would eventually include Panzer-Division Holstein, 233. Reserve-Panzer-Division and the tanks of the Schiess-Schule Putlos. Although the new division lacked transport and sufficient numbers of armoured vehicles, many of its personnel were combat veterans or instructors and the division's commander, Generalmajor Martin Unrein, was a highly experienced and competent officer. The division's first engagement took place on 12 April 1945, when tanks and infantry stopped a strong British attack near the town of Uelzen. Fighting continuously, by the last days of April 1945, the division had been reduced to a battle group of an undersized infantry regiment and barely a company of tanks. During its brief existence, three of the division's men - Major Gustav Walle, Leutnant Friedrich Anding and Obergefreiter Johann Stützel, all of Panzerjäger-Abteilung Grossdeutschland, were either nominated for, or awarded the Knight's Cross.



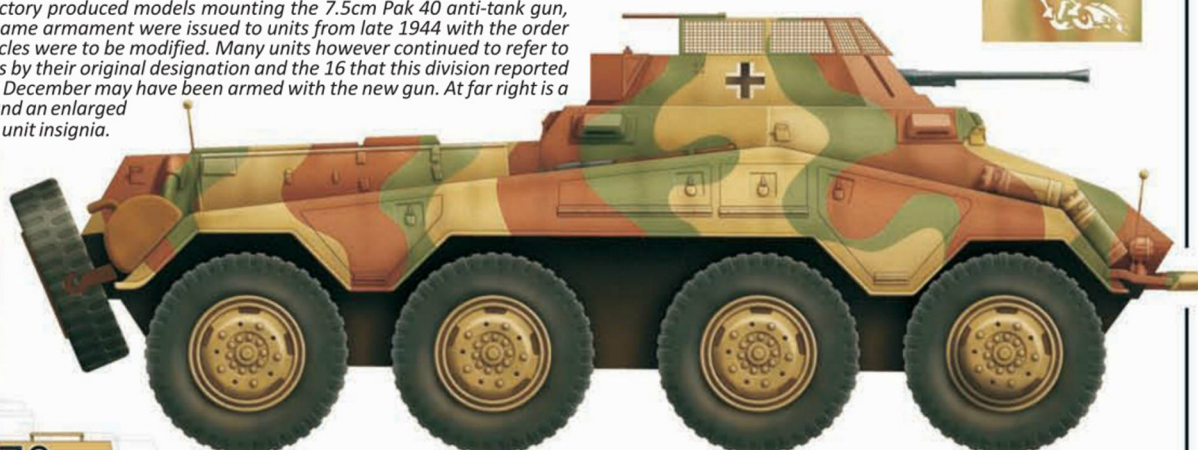
The division's original complement of armoured infantry was provided by Panzergrenadier-Ersatz und Ausbildungs-Regiment Feldherrnhalle which was officially attached on 6 April 1945. A training and replacement unit, it comprised three battalions totally 3,321 men and despite its title, had no transport for its Panzergrenadier companies which were in effect ordinary infantry units. It would appear that soon after joining the division, the regiment was reduced from three to two battalions with the surplus personnel forming a second regiment. As can be seen above, the regiments were then referred to as Feldherrnhalle 1 and 2 and this is first noted in a report of 12 April 1945. Confusingly, reports for 17 and 28 April both show Feldherrnhalle 1 as having three battalions, the latter report referring to "III/Panzergrenadier Ers u Aus Regt Feldherrnhalle". It is likely that the re-organisation was indeed carried out - as required by the new establishments created on 25 March - but that as replacements arrived, as they continued to do until at least 17 April, a new battalion was formed. Attached to the division on 6 April 1945, Panzergrenadier Regiment 42 was formed from the remnants of 233. Panzer-Division, a reserve formation. Motorised transport was provided for the Panzerjäger Kompanie only. It should be remembered that units were added to the division as they arrived and that some never did. Also, battle casualties and constant re-organisations meant that the order of battle changed on an almost daily basis. The table shown above therefore represents the division in mid-April 1945.



**Below: Sdkfz 251/22. 11. Panzer-Division. Germany, Spring 1945.** These vehicles were intended to replace Sdkfz 251/9 half-tracks in the reconnaissance units of armoured divisions and the heavy weapons companies of Panzergrenadier battalions.



Above: In addition to factory produced models mounting the 7.5cm Pak 40 anti-tank gun, conversion sets for the same armament were issued to units from late 1944 with the order that all Sdkfz 251/9 vehicles were to be modified. Many units however continued to refer to the converted half-tracks by their original designation and the 16 that this division reported as being available on 30 December may have been armed with the new gun. At far right is a rear view of the vehicle and an enlarged example of the division's unit insignia.

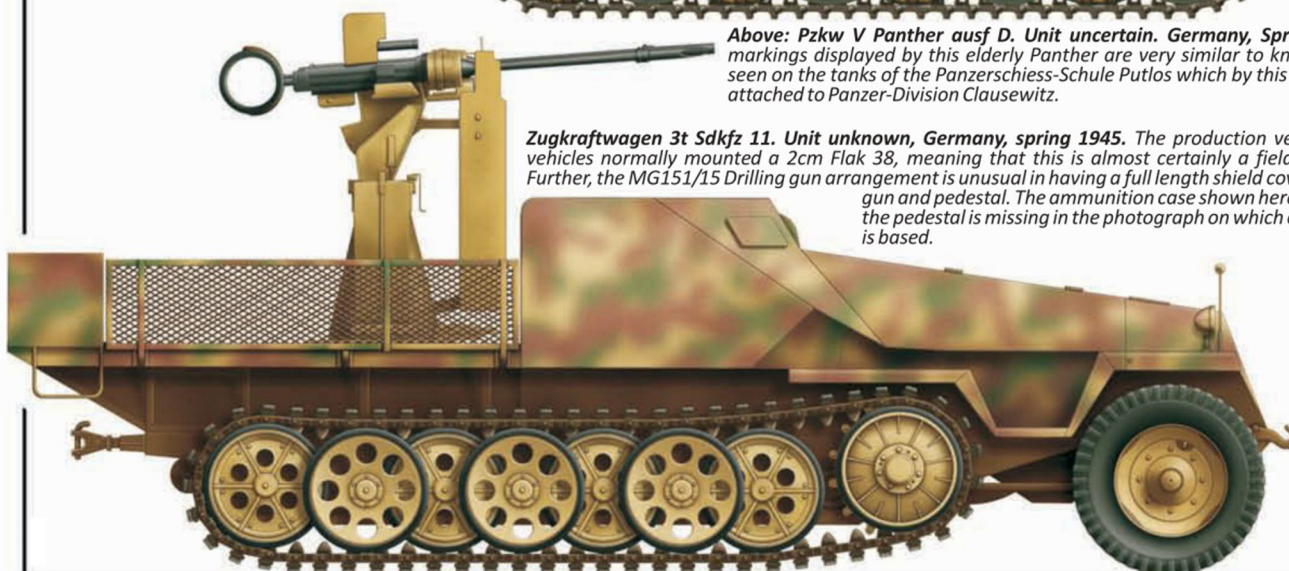


Above: A rear view of the vehicle depicted at right showing the placement of the tank's number on the turret rear.



Above: Sdkfz 234/1. Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 125, 25. Panzergrenadier-Division. Germany, Spring 1945. At far left is the division's unit insignia. The hard edge style of camouflage was commonly seen on these late production armoured cars.

Above: Pzkw V Panther ausf D. Unit uncertain. Germany, Spring 1945. The markings displayed by this elderly Panther are very similar to known examples seen on the tanks of the Panzerschiess-Schule Putlos which by this date had been attached to Panzer-Division Clausewitz.



Zugkraftwagen 3t Sdkfz 11. Unit unknown, Germany, spring 1945. The production version of these vehicles normally mounted a 2cm Flak 38, meaning that this is almost certainly a field modification. Further, the MG151/15 Drilling gun arrangement is unusual in having a full length shield covering both the gun and pedestal. The ammunition case shown here on the side of the pedestal is missing in the photograph on which our illustration is based.